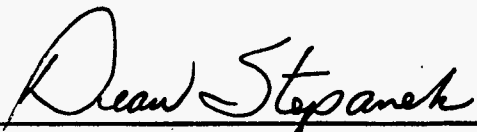


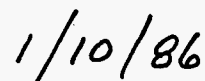
RECORD OF DECISION
for the
GARNET RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN
and the
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Prepared by:
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
BUTTE DISTRICT, MONTANA
GARNET RESOURCE AREA

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Dean Stepanek



Date

STATE DIRECTOR
MONTANA STATE OFFICE

RECORD OF DECISION GARNET RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN AND FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

This document records the decision reached by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for managing 145,660 surface acres of public land and 213,385 subsurface acres in the Garnet Resource Area.

DECISION

The decision is hereby made to approve Alternative E (Preferred) as described in the *Garnet Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement*, September 1985, as the resource management plan for the Garnet Resource Area. This plan was prepared under the regulations for implementing the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976 (43 CFR 1600). An environmental impact statement was prepared for this plan in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969.

The management direction to be followed under this decision is described in Chapter 2 of the draft Garnet Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (draft EIS) published in December 1984 and modified by the proposed Garnet Resource Management Plan and final Environmental Impact Statement (final EIS) published in September 1985. The following subsections form the core of the Garnet Resource Management Plan (RMP):

- Delineation of Management Areas (draft EIS pp. 13-14)

- Management Guidance Common to All Alternatives (final EIS pp. 56-63)

- Alternatives Considered in Detail, Alternative E: Preferred Alternative (final EIS pp. 63-65)

- Selection of the Preferred Alternative (draft EIS pp. 56-59, final EIS p. 66)

- Monitoring and Evaluation (draft EIS pp. 59-60, final EIS p. 66)

Incorporated by reference into these subsections are Appendixes A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, and S of the draft EIS and Appendixes T and U of the final EIS. Also incorporated by reference are maps in the map packet at the back of the draft EIS.

Effective with this decision is the designation of the Limestone Cliff Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). This area will be managed in accordance with the general provisions established in the Garnet RMP. More specific management guidance for the area will be provided as needed through the development of an activity plan.

Pursuant to the BLM grazing regulations (43 CFR Part 4100), a rangeland program summary and appropriate updates will be prepared for the Garnet Resource Area and distributed for public information. The proposed decisions adjusting livestock use will then be issued to grazing permittees or lessees. The summary will also identify other specific actions needed to implement the rangeland management guidelines identified in the Garnet RMP.

Section 603 of FLPMA directs the Secretary of the Interior to review areas of 5,000 acres or more of the public lands determined to have wilderness characteristics and to report to the President a recommendation as to the suitability of each such area for preservation as wilderness. The Wales Creek and the Hoodoo Mountain Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) are being studied under this section of FLPMA. The Secretary's recommendations must be reported to the President by October 21, 1991, and the President's recommendations must be reported to Congress by October 21, 1993. Congress ultimately decides whether to designate areas as wilderness.

Section 202 of FLPMA provides authority to study and recommend areas of less than 5,000 acres not covered under Section 603 for wilderness designation through the land use planning process. The Gallagher Creek and the Quigg West WSAs are being studied under this section of FLPMA. The study and reporting requirements for these areas are the same as for areas studied under Section 603 with the exception of those areas recommended as nonsuitable for wilderness designation studied under Section 202 of FLPMA.

Completion of this record of decision for the Garnet RMP/EIS approves the planning decisions for all resources, including the recommendation of the Gallagher Creek 202 WSA as nonsuitable for wilderness designation. The recommendations for the Wales Creek, Hoodoo Mountain, and Quigg West WSAs covered in the Garnet RMP will be addressed further in a separate legislative Preliminary Final EIS and Wilderness Suitability Report (WSR) that will be transmitted to the Secretary. The Secretary signs a record of decision when transmitting that WSR to the President.

This decision is based on consideration of the issues involved, the environmental consequences of the proposed RMP and alternatives, public comments on the draft EIS, the results of consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service, and other factors. All significant considerations forming the basis for this decision are discussed in the two sections which follow.

ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

Alternatives Considered In Detail

Five alternatives were considered in detail in the draft EIS. One of these, the preferred alternative (Alternative E), became the proposed RMP discussed in the final EIS. These alternatives are summarized below.

Alternative A (No Action)

Alternative A represents a continuation of present management direction. This alternative is derived from five approved management framework plans,

programmatic environmental assessments, State Director Guidance, completed activity plans, and various statutes, policy directives, and regulations. The purpose of Alternative A is to provide a baseline for the comparison of other alternatives. The response to each issue and needed decision in Alternative A is determined largely by existing management guidance and direction. In addressing the decision on land ownership adjustments, the no action alternative is defined as maintaining the existing land ownership pattern. However, for most issues and decisions, the no action alternative incorporates future management activities which normally would be expected to occur based on existing guidance.

Alternative B

Alternative B emphasizes the availability of public land for the production of commodity resources such as timber, energy and minerals, and livestock forage. This alternative generally resolves each of the planning issues so as to provide the minimum level of protection required by law for soil, water, air, endangered species, and similar noncommodity resources. In so doing, this alternative generally indicates the highest sustainable levels of availability and production that could be permitted for commodity resources in the planning area.

The response to each issue and needed decision in Alternative B is determined by commodity resource potentials and legal requirements for the protection of noncommodity resources.

Alternative C

Alternative C emphasizes the maintenance or improvement of resource conditions and environmental values such as wildlife habitat and wilderness. This alternative generally resolves each of the planning issues so as to provide a high level of protection for environmental and amenity values; resource use and development would be permitted to the extent compatible with the environmental protection emphasis. This alternative also emphasizes the availability of public land for a variety of nonmotorized recreation uses. Under Alternative C, all WSAs would be recommended for wilderness designation.

The response to each issue and needed decision in Alternative C is determined largely by the condition and potential of amenity resources and the ability to produce commodity resources while attaining environmental protection objectives.

Alternative D

Alternative D, like Alternative C, emphasizes the maintenance or improvement of resource conditions and environmental values. However, Alternative D differs from Alternative C in that only portions of three WSAs and all of a fourth WSA would be recommended for wilderness designation. Wilderness recommendations would be designed to protect the portion of each WSA with the highest wilderness values and to minimize conflicts with nonwilderness uses and opportunities. Wilderness boundaries also would be designed to enhance the manageability of designated areas and adjoining lands.

The response to each issue and needed decision in Alternative D is identical to those discussed for Alternative C except for those portions of the three WSAs that are not being recommended for wilderness designation.

Alternative E (Preferred)

Alternative E incorporates portions of the other four alternatives and generally represents a middle ground approach to issue resolution. This alternative balances competing demands by making public lands available for a wide variety of resource uses while protecting and enhancing important and sensitive environmental values.

The response to each issue and needed decision in Alternative E is based on the full range of resource potentials and conditions as well as legal and policy requirements and social and economic considerations.

Selection of the Preferred Alternative

All of the alternatives considered in detail are environmentally acceptable. On the basis of the effects on only biological and physical factors, Alternative C appears to be the most favorable environmentally. However, Alternative E is favored because it provides continued economic opportunities for dependent industries in the fields of energy, minerals, range, and forestry; permits a continuous flow of resources which complement the social environment of local communities; and provides a physical and biological setting which maintains or improves important surface resource values such as vegetative condition, water quality, and fish and wildlife habitat. The potential for temporary and localized air quality degradation, soil erosion, and visual quality degradation is slightly higher than in less management-intensive alternatives. These impacts, however, will be short-lived and well within acceptable limits.

Descriptions of the alternatives considered in detail, environmental consequences, and alternatives eliminated from detailed study were previously provided in the draft and final EIS documents. These documents are available for review at the Garnet Resource Area Office.

Alternatives Eliminated from Detailed Study

The following alternatives were considered as possible methods of resolving specific issues in the Garnet Resource Area but were eliminated from detailed study due to technical, legal, and/or other constraints.

No Grazing

The elimination of livestock grazing from all public land was considered as a possible method of resolving grazing related issues. Based on interdisciplinary analysis during the criteria development step of the planning process, the no grazing alternative was eliminated from further study. The analysis of the no grazing alternative is provided in Appendix N (draft EIS pp. 229-232).

Maximum Unconstrained Alternatives

No alternatives that proposed maximum resource areawide production or protection of one resource at the expense of other resources were considered because this would violate the BLM's legal mandate to manage public land on a multiple use, sustained yield basis.

OTHER MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Each alternative considered in detail represents a comprehensive plan for managing all land and resources in the Garnet Resource Area. However, what differentiates one alternative from another is the way each of the five planning issue groups would be resolved if that alternative were selected for implementation. Thus, selection of the proposed RMP (Alternative E) was based largely on the effects of the alternative in resolving issues.

Rationale for the selection of the proposed RMP and a discussion of how each issue would be resolved upon RMP implementation were previously provided in the draft and final EIS documents.

Public Participation

A Federal Register notice was published on February 20, 1981 that announced the formal start of the planning process.

A preliminary list of 17 major issues was mailed to about 600 individuals and organizations for comment in February 1981. Open houses on the issues were held February 25, 1981 in Drummond; February 26, 1981 in Missoula; March 3, 1981 in Philipsburg; and March 5, 1981 in Ovando. The District Advisory Council also reviewed the preliminary issues and the public response to them in March 1981. As a result of the input from about 100 persons who attended the open house and 60 written comments, issues were redefined and three new ones were added. These were published for further public comment in November 1981. They were subsequently grouped into five broad issues from which the plan developed. The final list was published in August 1982.

Resource inventories were conducted in 1982 and 1983, and a management situation analysis was prepared that examined the capability of the public lands to accommodate the needs and issues previously identified. The criteria for developing the RMP and the District Manager's Concept of the RMP were published for public review in July 1983. Five comments were received.

In early 1984, work began on the formulation of alternatives. Resource specialists aided in the development and made suggestions on resource allocations leading to the analysis of alternatives as laid out in the draft EIS.

After the draft EIS was filed with the Environmental Protection Agency in December 1984 and released to the public, a period of 90 days was allowed for public

review and comment. The Federal Register of December 14, 1984 carried a notice of availability and announced a public hearing and two open houses at Missoula and Drummond on February 13, 1985 and February 20, 1985 respectively.

A news release published on December 16, 1984 announced the availability of the draft EIS and gave a summary of the document. This release, which gave the times and locations for the hearing and open houses, was sent to national wire services, daily newspapers, weekly newspapers, radio stations, and television stations throughout western Montana.

Also, between September 1984 and February 1985 a series of meetings and briefings were held with interested parties totalling 62 individuals.

Approximately 400 copies of the draft EIS were distributed to governmental agencies, businesses, organizations, grazing lessees, and interested individuals. Public reading copies were available at BLM offices in Washington D.C.; Billings, Butte, and Missoula, Montana; the University of Montana and Montana State University; and the public libraries in Missoula, Granite, Powell, Lewis and Clark, and Silver Bow counties.

Seven individuals testified at the hearing in Missoula and 47 comment letters were received by the close of the comment period.

Most of those submitting comments were concerned with wilderness recommendations, grazing, road management, wildlife habitat management, and forest management. In response to comments received, several changes were made to the draft EIS and incorporated into the proposed RMP and final EIS. These changes are summarized as follows:

- There was a decrease in the proposed number and amount of expenditures for range improvements;

- a resource monitoring and evaluation plan was included as Appendix U in the proposed RMP and final EIS;

- a table identifying water quality problem areas and proposed mitigating actions was included in Chapter 3, Affected Environment;

- the Statewide Water Quality Management Plan and the Cooperative Fish Management Plan for Public Lands in Montana were made a part of management guidance common to all alternatives;

- several misspelled words and wrong dates relating to geology were corrected;

- definitions of high, medium, and low energy/mineral potential in Table 3-4 were included as a footnote;

- a statement concerning access to private lands was inserted as management guidance common to all alternatives;

- reference to the Lewis and Clark Trail was incorporated into Chapter 3, Affected Environment;

acreages in Appendix P, Wilderness Opportunities Within Montana, were updated;

consideration of leaving old roads open for recreation use was added as a criteria for road management;

consideration of improvement costs and the benefit to cost ratio was added as a criteria for livestock grazing; and

the acreage limitation for single or group tree selection units in Management Areas 5 and 6 was removed.

The proposed RMP and final EIS was mailed to the public on September 25, 1985 and a period of 30 days was allowed for review and protest. No protests were received on the proposed plan.

All comments to the draft EIS have been considered in preparing this decision. Additional and more specific information concerning public comments and responses may be found in Chapters 7 and 8 and Appendix T of the final EIS.

Consistency

This plan is consistent with the plans, programs and policies of other federal agencies and of state and local governments.

Implementation

The selected resource management plan incorporates measures for mitigating undesirable environmental effects. These measures are identified in the draft and final EIS documents and will be applied during implementation of the RMP. In some cases, additional mitigating measures will be developed and applied during activity planning.

The effects of implementing the Garnet RMP will be monitored and evaluated on a periodic basis to assure that the desired results are being achieved. The general purposes, priorities, and methods to be used in monitoring and evaluation are identified in Appendix U of the final EIS document.

All practical means to avoid or minimize adverse environmental impacts will be achieved through the mitigation and monitoring provisions of the selected plan. Implementation of the Garnet RMP is expected to occur over a period of ten years or longer, depending on the availability of funding and personnel.

The Garnet Resource Area office of the Butte District will be responsible for implementation and monitoring of the Garnet RMP.

Distribution

This record of decision has been sent to all recipients of the proposed Garnet Resource Management Plan and final Environmental Impact Statement. Additional copies are available from the Garnet Area Manager, 3255 Fort Missoula Road, Missoula, Montana 59801; telephone (406) 329-3914.

The Bureau of Land Management will publish a condensed version of the Garnet Resource Management Plan. This document is designed as a working document to guide BLM managers and resource area employees. It will be available to the public. If you would like a copy, please fill in your address on the mailer on the back of this document and mail it to the Garnet Resource Area office, 3255 Fort Missoula Road, Missoula, Montana 59801.